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XVI CENTURY CASSONI

During the past year the funds of the Institute have been largely devoted to the purchase of objects of household or decorative art, and a number of interesting pieces of furniture have been acquired which will become a part of the period rooms planned for the new museum.

design by the most eminent craftsmen and artists of the day, and it was not unusual to find artists of note designing and executing pieces of furniture.

Artists and cabinet makers from other countries came to learn from the Italian masters, and the spirit



CARVED WALNUT CASSONE, ITALIAN XVI CENTURY

Beginning with the Italian Renaissance, that period which is the starting point and inspiration of all succeeding furniture styles, we have been fortunate in securing a number of typical pieces, among them three XVI Century cassoni—each one a splendid example of the craftsmanship of this century.

The outburst of intellectual energy that came with the Renaissance, and from which sprang discoveries, inventions and great art achievements, had its corresponding influence on the crafts. The liberal patronage bestowed on the decorative arts by the wealthy nobles of Florence, Milan, Rome and Venice, encouraged the development of furniture

and styles of the Italian Renaissance swept across the continent.

In general the style of the furniture of this period was palatial rather than domestic in character. It was a period of spacious dimensions, of dignified splendor, and of intense virility and vigor. Most of the furniture was highly ornamental, and carving, painting, gilding, veneering, gesso work, intarsia and *pietra dura* were all employed. The chief pieces were chests, cabinets, tables, and the curule and high-backed chairs, with an occasional credenza or buffet.

The chests or cassoni, which were conspicuous and highly significant pieces of furniture in Italian fur-

nishing schemes, placed along the walls in halls and corridors or salons, were used to preserve tapestries, clothes, plate and other valuables, or served as marriage chests.

The three pieces which have been acquired for the Institute's collection illustrate some of the chief methods of ornamentation—carving, intarsia, and polychrome.

depicted is full of vitality and vigor

The polychrome chest, in the form of a sarcophagus, is made of one of the finer woods and the surface coated with gesso to give a smooth and suitable ground for the application of the pigment and gold. The design on the front is evidently the family armorial bearings.



POLYCHROME CHEST, ITALIAN XVI CENTURY

When carving began to assume so much importance, the coarse-grained oak was abandoned, and walnut, chestnut and the finer woods took its place. The lives of saints came to play a less prominent part, and mythological, allegorical and historical subjects became popular, and we find in our chest that combination of purely decorative scroll work and pictorial form which we have come to associate with the Renaissance style. The tournament scene

Ivory and bone inlay, which had been popular in Venice for more than a century, was now partially superseded by inlays of natural or dyed woods, scorched or etched with hot sand or iron and polished with oils. This form, known as intarsia, is well illustrated in the third chest. The early geometrical and floral patterns have here given way to arabesques with their fantastic dragons and playful, half-human figures—motives much used during this period.

J. W.